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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on research conducted in the Language and Society Centre of the National Languages Institute of Australia, Monash University, into interaction in English between non-native speakers from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds. The project emphasizes two aspects of verbal interaction where language-specific rules are closely linked with cultural value systems: the pragmatic, communicative level of language and the organization of discourse. Most of the corpus comprises spontaneous communication audiorecorded from workplace interactions between key non-English-speaking background (NESB) informants and other NESB speakers. A corpus of sample speech acts derived from the project are presented. Contrasts in communication patterns that were noted by informants between central and southern Europeans and east and southeast Asians are discussed. It is suggested that intercultural variation in the interpretation and production of speech acts is determined by differences in cultural value systems. Policy implications of the study for teaching English as a Second Language are addressed. (JP)

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PATTERNS OF INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN MELBOURNE FACTORIES: SOME RESEARCH IN PROGRESS[1]

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INTRODUCTION

The "multiculturalism" paradigm is well established in policies and the provision of services in Australia. So films and other programs are transmitted in community languages with English sub-titles on SBS-TV, public libraries stock books and other materials in a wide range of languages, and community language programs in schools are usually available to all children. While there have been major advances in recent years in the delivery of English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for adults, including those in the work place, the structures and goals are still directed towards making it easier for non-English-speaking migrants to communicate with "Australians". In reality, 40% of those employed in manufacturing industries are non-native speakers of English. The proportion is higher in the "lower" levels of the work-force (i.e. on the factory floor). Many workers communicate in English for most of the day in the work domain with non-native speakers of the language from other ethnolinguistic backgrounds.

This paper reports on research conducted in the Language and Society Centre of the National Languages Institute of Australia, Monash University, into interaction in English between non-native speakers, largely with higher levels of competence in the language, from *different* ethnolinguistic backgrounds. I shall discuss the selection of workplaces and research sites, methods of data collection and analysis, report on insights gained so far on the

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nature of inter-cultural communication, and the implications of this research for policies and the Training Guarantee Scheme.

Australia not only has very specific needs in this area; it offers unique opportunities for research. Where else do sizeable numbers of, say, Turks and Vietnamese, or of Lebanese, Poles, and Chinese live and work together at close quarters? Such groups have had no previous history of culture contact and they share few communication principles that they do not also have in common with "mainstream" Australians. Prior to the fairly recent arrival of large numbers of Chinese and Vietnamese speakers and other Asians in Australia, non-English speaking migrants perceived that they shared a common set of communication patterns (a commonality of foreignness) even though they might have no common language other than English. These patterns distinguished them and native English speakers from one another.

SELECTION OF WORK-PLACES AND RESEARCH SITES

Three main criteria were applied for the selection of the areas to be investigated:

(i) four major *industries* employing large numbers of non-English speakers were selected: Heavy (automobile), textiles, electronics, and catering;

(ii) the *location* of the factory within the metropolitan area of Melbourne (northern, western, south-eastern, eastern), since this influences the ethnolinguistic composition;

(iii) the national origin of the parent company (U.S., Australia, Japan, Germany), since this may influence the company's sensitivity to inter-cultural problems.

The work places selected were:

A. Car factory of American origin in the northern suburbs,

B. Textile factory of Australian origin in the western suburbs,

C. Car factory of Japanese origin in the south-eastern suburbs,

D. Electronics factory of German origin in the eastern suburbs.

In addition, data is being gathered in the catering section of a migrant hostel in the south-eastern suburbs, at the office of an Adult Migration Education Centre, at an office of the Commonwealth Employment Service, and at meetings of a multicultural parents' group at a high school in the south-eastern suburbs.

As a result of negotiation with management, workers and unions, and observation, a number of research sites were chosen in each workplace - on the basis of ethnolinguistic composition, communication richness of the work situation, and relatively low noise level.

METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION

Data collection began with a period of observation by a field worker. In this way the field workers could acquaint themselves with the communication situations, select research sites, and gain rapport with potential informants. However, most of our corpus comprises spontaneous communication audio-recorded from workplace interactions between key non-English-speaking background (NESB) informants wearing a lapel microphone and other NESB speakers. The following factors determined the selection of the key informants:

(i) their willingness to participate,

(ii) their ethnolinguistic background,

(iii) their frequent need to communicate at work with people from different NESBs,

(iv) the range of their communicative acts other than just set routines, including receiving and making requests and complaints, giving their advice;

(v) their gender and position in the hierarchy of the company.

Where possible, cultural background, gender, and status are alternated in the choice of key informants at different research sites to facilitate assessing the effects of those on the communication patterns (e.g. If at one research site, we have communication between a male Croatian 'superordinate' and a female Vietnamese 'subordinate', we would try to find opportunities for similar interactions in another research site between a Vietnamese 'superordinate' and a Croatian 'subordinate' and between a female Croatian 'superordinate' and a male Vietnamese 'subordinate' in a third). Though status within company hierarchies is sometimes related to gender and ethnicity, this is certainly not always the case. Thus, the inter-cultural communication situation with cultural background as a co-determinate of communication patterns could be contrasted with 'standard' monolingual work situations (especially on the factory floor) where status marks power in the way in which people communicate. Follow-up interviews within a few days of the original interaction (cf. Neustupny 1985) facilitate interpretation of inter-cultural communication breakdown.

A second smaller corpus of data is derived from videotapes of meetings of employee participation (quality circle) groups, comprising people from different NESB groups, in which ideas are discussed and reports presented. This data is therefore of a more formal nature than the spontaneous communication on the audiotapes. The videos also give us an opportunity to assess the relation between verbal and non-verbal communication across cultures.

The emphasis on spontaneous communication departs from an established tradition in this field of research to use elicited role-play to gather data (See e.g. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989, Olesky 1989). Role play is not an altogether adequate substitute for naturalistic data in that informants will then tend to behave the way they feel they 'ought' to. We have found that 90 minutes of taping is a sufficiently long time to avoid people 'playing their roles'. This is particularly so in crisis situations. On the other hand, we need to consider the effect on speech and dyadic

communication of speakers staring at the microphone.

The method of transcription adopted for this project is based largely on Ehlich and Rehbein's (1976) Halbinterpretative Analyse Transkription (HIAT) where some of the interpretation is already done during the transcription.[2]

ON THE NATURE OF INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

This project is concerned with human verbal interaction. As in other human behaviour, variation in verbal interaction is determined by individual and sub-cultural (social class, gender, occupational) as well as by cultural variables. Communication occurs not only in a social setting but also in a cultural context in which people conform to or contravene behavioural norms. While we are attempting to concentrate on cultural differences, we appreciate that these intersect with sub-cultural and individual ones and that it will not always be possible to separate them.

The project emphasizes two aspects of verbal interaction where language-specific rules are closely linked with cultural value systems. One is the *pragmatic* level of language - that aspect concerned with communicative function, communicative intention and communicative effects of utterances, i.e. language as an instrument of action. Austin (1963) and Searle (1969) developed the study of speech acts (doing things with words), such as promises, requests, complaints, and apologies. The other 'prominent aspect of human interaction in our research is the *organization of discourse* (i.e. continuous passages beyond the sentence level), especially of *conversations* (cf. Henne and Rehbock 1982). A major focus of this is the sequencing of conversations. Variation in this can influence both the decoding of the message and attitudes towards the speaker.

Turn-taking involves sequencing of the parts played by each speaker in a given interaction. (Its investigation was pioneered by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, e.g. 1974). Goodwin (1981: 21) defines turn-taking as 'the process through which the party doing the talk at the moment is changed'. This includes allowing the

person a turn to speak, keeping your turn when someone else wants it, and appropriating a turn through interruption. Procedures adopted by a particular speaker can also determine the outcome of the communication, as I shall show through examples. Speech acts and discourse organization cannot be isolated from other aspects of language and we sometimes need to take grammatical, lexical, phonological and prosodic (intonational) phenomena into account.

Our study can contribute to an understanding of how people from different cultures communicate, for the inter-cultural dyads and any problems in communication will highlight the contrasts in their verbal behaviour. However, it will not always be possible to come to conclusions on culture-specific behaviour - firstly because people do not always interact the same way in second language (and culture) and first language (and culture) contexts, as has become apparent in various studies of learner's speech (Faerch and Kasper 1983, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1986, Olesky 1989). Also, we do not have enough information on pragmatics and discourse organization in all the relevant monolingual first language (L1) contexts. The volume resulting from the Cross Cultural Speech Act Research Project (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989) covers only six language and cultural contexts, and there have not been even fragmentary studies of the appropriate aspects of most of the languages we would require to check phenomena in the English of our informants. Even with the now widely recognized limitations of contrastive analysis between languages as an instrument to predict errors (see Corder 1981), the essential prerequisites for such an analysis are not available. The multilateral data base covering many cultures ensures that we do not regard as absolute what is relative (See below, Section 7).

Where there is no appropriate research literature on the relevant L1 phenomena, we are drawing on resource persons, native speakers (linguists or language teachers) who can advise us on culture-specific behaviour. However, we are concentrating on how inter-cultural communication works, what types of problems occur, and how they can be resolved or avoided rather than on

questions of pragmatic interference. We are encountering a range of communication that runs smoothly throughout, communication that is totally unsuccessful from the point of view of at least one of the parties, communication with problems that are resolved within the discourse, and communication which necessarily includes a component of negotiation of meaning (See Section 5). Unsuccessful communication, where communicative effect does not correspond to communicative intention, can be characterized as either *non-communication* (where the message is not getting across) and *miscommunication* (where an unintended message is getting across). Both of these can be regarded as contributing to communication breakdown. Miscommunication is the greater problem as it often goes unnoticed and can lead to communication conflict, in which people's dignity and trust, i.e. their face, are threatened. Brown and Levinson (1978) in their framework of politeness in communication distinguish between negative face 'the want of every "competent adult member" that his actions be unimpeded by others' (Brown and Levinson 1978: 67) and positive face 'the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others' (p. 67).

A specific case of non-communication is *parallel discourse*, where the two parties are talking about different topics based on a common starting-point without taking much notice of one another's discourse.

In our experience, communication conflict is frequently caused less by miscommunication than by an attempted realization of a speech act and/ or by turn-taking behaviour which, according to the norms of *one* of the interactants in a dyad is considered inappropriate or impolite.

Not only is inter-cultural communication breakdown the result of people from different cultures encoding/decoding messages in different ways. The response to communication breakdown also varies across cultures in accordance with face-saving requirements in the culture concerned. Among culture-based reactions to a communication breakdown are:

(i) ignoring that the communication breakdown

has occurred;

(ii) admitting that it has occurred according to particular (culture-specific) rules of politeness;

(iii) blaming the other party for the communication breakdown;

(iv) employing a solidarity marker such as laughter.

The Work-place

It is not the intention of the project to offer a critique of the institution of the industrial work-place or, for that matter, of the capitalist economic system. We are attempting to analyse inter-cultural communication for its own sake and at the same time contribute to the alleviation of communication problems which have social, psychological and economic consequences (See Section 7).

THE CORPUS: A FEW EXAMPLES

So far we have 125 hours of spontaneous communication on audiotape and four hours of meetings on videotape. There are twenty-six key informants who have worn a lapel microphone so far and, of course, they have taped their interactions with many other people. The backgrounds of the key informants are: Filipino, Indonesian, Malaysian Chinese, Vietnamese, Indian, Fijian Indian, Sri Lankan (various ethnic groups), Austrian, Croatian, Hungarian, Italian, Maltese, Salvadorian, Finnish.

The speech acts most prominently represented are complaints, requests, directives (instructions), and apologies. Speech acts are not as distinct as they have often been described in works on theoretical linguistics. Complaints and apologies often share one segment of discourse. The same speech act (e.g. complaint, request, apology) is sometimes realized again and again in quite different ways, using different schemata (Rumelhart 1975) - cognitive structures through which interactants can apply their knowledge of the world to interpret the intention of discourse in

an encounter. For instance, a self-initiated apology from a Polish woman process worker in an interaction with a Malaysian-Chinese leading hand comprises the following schemata:

(i) taking the blame:
'it was my fault alright'

(ii) simultaneously expressing uncertainty about the responsibility:
'I don't know whose fault'
'Hong told me not to tell anyone it was # # mixed up'

(iii) giving a justification (Cf. Rehbein 1972):
'because I find that in the middle of the job was. accidentally i find oh # what's going wrong and after all i. check every part i put in'
'it was their + boards i didn't want to the reason was because was mixed up the components'

(iv) an appeal for sympathy based on her own sensitivity: .
'i'm very sensitive'
'he (her husband) said "oh you should leave that job"'

(v) an indirect apology:
'I feel so + so bad y'know'.

The Malaysian-Chinese interlocutor does not comprehend the purpose of the lengthy apology. It may reflect the Eastern European 'patronage system' in which the 'subordinate' has to gain the favour of the 'superordinate' to get him/ her out of difficulties or in order to advance economically or professionally. In some cultures, face is threatened by apologizing, in others by not apologizing, in still others by not apologizing appropriately. In this exchange the interlocutor, irritated by the continual expression of anxiety and guilt, tries to stop the apology sequence by:

(i) the multiple use of the Australian routine 'Don't worry'

(ii) expressing her understanding:

'For me ++ is nothing worrying me'
'I understand these things'
'It just do happen'

(iii) digressing from the topic:
'Is your husband back back from Atlantic?'

(iv) laughter as a solidarity strategy.

None of these responses satisfy the Polish woman but her 'superior' is finally able to give the desired reassurance: 'I'll fix up for you'.

The Malaysian-Chinese leading hand, together with other Asian employees, is also at the receiving end of a speech act sequence comprising a lengthy set of schemata. This time it is from her Croatian male supervisor who is complaining about the work ethics of the women. There are two main schemata:

(i) 'It is the responsibility of all of you to work hard and well
I don't understand the one things how peoples are not ashamed to sitting doing nothing'
'we need output from that area and i see people who are soldering then cleaning the boards'

(ii) Soldering is not a wonderful job, but it is very important
'you know how much we need the soldering ++++ we desperately need soldering people to do e...[Name] or to do any # job on soldering in the area'
'i know it's # not # it's not ++++ easy job'

and two subsidiary schemata:

(i) Solderers must not waste their time on cleaning

(ii) Some people are not doing anything.

The Croatian relentlessly dominates the interaction. There is a mismatch between his speech act requesting a reason and his turn-taking behaviour which prevents a reason from being given:

'What's the reason + if they go there and they sit there ten minutes and after that they just disappear + I would like to see what's the

reason is there any reason for that tell me.'

The Malaysian-Chinese's request for confirmation that he really wants a reason is acceded.

'yeah I would like to have a reason'.

So negotiation of meaning is not possible due to inter-cultural differences in the underlying assumptions of the communication (whether it is a monologue or a dialogue).

The nexus between complaint and apology (or communication) is exemplified in another exchange between the two above interlocutors, this time without any passive participants. Sometimes it is the complainer who ends up having to apologize after wrongly accusing someone. Not all factory complaints yield an apology, probably because of status relations. In the case under consideration, the supervisor expresses his disapproval and power through interrogatives:

'what do you stop changing these things?'

imperatives:

'tell me how many connectors you changed hundreds of it'

and modals:

'you may not destroy these connectors'

'you may not put them in the rubbish'

'you can keep them separate and count them you know that'.

Every reproach receives an immediate response, usually a justification:

'these are all from last week'

'I have asked them to send some extra connectors'

'but Monday we have started with the new carrier and they're all good + no rejects'.

In contrast to the previous segment, this one is not characterized by extremely asymmetrical turns where the Croatian monopolizes the floor, probably because he is involved in dyadic communication and not giving a 'public' performance.

Watts (1989) distinguishes between cultures such as Swiss

German in which each person puts their views and others such as British, where there is a 'sharing of the text', where topic and topic change are negotiated. Both in our meeting videos and in the tapes of routine communication on the factory floor, individuals from particular cultural groups, that is Singhalese, Pakistanis, Burghers from Sri Lanka, Croats, Hungarians, Austrians, are likely to have longer turns, to appropriate turns more often and are more likely to prevent others from taking over than our informants from other groups. In some cultures (notably Finnish), much use is made of 'thinking pauses' which are not to be interrupted by people thinking aloud (Schröder 1987, Lenz 1990). Long silences also occur for different reasons in Vietnamese, where it should be seen in relation to the cultural importance of harmony and deference to authority (See Do Toan 1989). In our corpus we have selected as key informants people from 'long turn' groups who interact at work with people from other 'long turn' groups (e.g. Croatian/ Burgher) and those from 'short turn/ long silence groups' interacting with those from other 'short turn/ long silence groups' (e.g. Finnish/ Vietnamese). In this way we hope to ascertain how much these common factors contribute to successful communication and to what extent other factors predominate.

Types of complaints

The two complaints discussed above are both examples of discourse directed towards a particular person or towards people (i.e. to the second person), discourse which is a request for action. One of the generalizations that can be drawn is that the complainer has the longest turn regardless of usual culture-based rules. For instance, in the complaint routine a normally rather silent Vietnamese woman outtalks her male Burgher 'superior'. There is another type of complaint which can be described as a 'whinge'. As in the 'request for action', the complainer has the longest turn. But here the goal is not resolution but the opportunity to be listened to. Thus 'whinges' are between equals as well as between those with asymmetrical power relationships. No justification is required

in this type of complaint. One example is parallel discourse where a Ceylonese Burgher leading hand and a Maltese supervisor are 'whinging' independently, with one prompting the other's complaining:

cm: look i was wondering why we are conjuction
cm: that there's
db: now about that one

db: I told her she was keeping a bit of space and
db: putting it about oh [what's that

cm: gina
db: xxx know who i mean] gina and i came and
db: i said you will do the normal

db: that woman doesn't understand a word of
cm: who gina
db: english mm she doesn't

cm: why i wonder why i said to her looks
db: know [here
db: the xxx] to me nothing

db: bloody four seconds flat i finished the corner
cm: i say
cm: look spray a little bit on the

cm: corner of the trim ah + and send it to the heat
cm: know what she done she send
cm: it on to the heat without put any glue
db: she doesn't listen
cm: al all + of no you

cm: know why because i don't want conjuction
db: yeah
cm: there [that's why] i want the system

cm: running how it should be
db: and i said look im have
db: done about three bloody door trims

db: and i go on the [cutting] table and another one
db: is coming fucking hell it's not
db: hard for me just four seconds for me to do that
db: one like that wack wack wack

cm: even i said many times even one day said so my
cm: daughter is coming they get upset but we are not
cm: behind we are actually ahead
db: yeah now there be in

db: there extra [xxx]
cm: yeah but i want you after tea
cm: please we start doing those door trims because
cm: i've got the truck here ++ have a cup of coffee
db: ah okay

Small talk

Small talk is casual or phatic communication intended to establish empathy between individuals and thereby ease more goal-directed communication along (Malinowski 1949, Ventola 1979, Edmonson and House 1981, Schneider 1988). It includes openings and closings, tends to be disconnected and unimportant, informal and superficial, unfocused, and concerned with general, everyday things (Schneider 1988). In some cultures, work ethics make it not very acceptable for small talk to precede such speech acts which are necessary for essential work to proceed. This would appear to be the reason why work place communication between an Austrian shop steward and her Vietnamese offsiders ends in temporary non-communication or miscommunication. In the following extract, the Vietnamese woman KV shows her Austrian shop steward AA some broken parts:

aa: hallo Kim haven't seen you ++ what's
kv: hallo
aa: ↓ wrong +++ ooh they're ↑ breaking
kv: yeah see
kv: ++++ i beg your pardon what do you want

aa: I haven't seen you for a long time
kv: oh ↓yeah

The Vietnamese worker is both puzzled and frustrated by the lack of progress made in this conversation. She was expecting some advice or request for action but receives mainly phatic communication in terms of an indirect speech act. According to Nguyen Xuan Thu (personal communication), Vietnamese communication is concrete rather than abstract; questions are direct rather than indirect (i.e. not in the form of statements), specific rather than general The Vietnamese woman signals non-communication. The problem remains unresolved at the end of the exchange.

Further development of this project

For the remaining year of this project, we will continue to collect data ensuring that the inter-cultural dyads are alternated as much as possible for gender and status. In completing the analysis, we will endeavour to relate the management of communication and communication breakdown where appropriate to cultural value systems (See below, Section 6). We will attempt to describe this in a culturally neutral form.

We also hope to focus on differences between types of work-places. For instance, so far it appears that turn differences based on culture, gender and status are more pronounced on the factory floor than in other research sites. It is a contrast between a hierarchial structure, where power has at least apparently to be maintained, and a more habitual dyadic situation or stable network, where solidarity prevails over power.

Work is currently in progress on intercultural differences in the perception of different communication patterns and on attitudes towards them. The data is derived from videotaped reactions to videos of role-play based on our corpus.

It is our intention that this project be followed up by an investigation into successful and unsuccessful communication with

recently-arrived migrants in industry. Native English speaking supervisors and others with native-like command of English would be recorded interacting extensively in English with people whose English proficiency is very limited. This data would be gathered before and after a training course in inter-cultural communication to assess the effects of such training.

SOME CULTURAL DIFFERENCES: THE "EUROPEAN" / "ASIAN" DIVIDE

There was a consensus among the informants in discussions with the field workers that the sharp dividing line in communication patterns was between central and southern Europeans (and perhaps South Asians) on the one hand, and east and south-east Asians on the other. In fact, much work-place communication in Australia is currently between such dyads. Central and southern Europeans have generally been in Australia much longer than the 'Asian' interactants. They believe that their own patterns are closer to 'Anglo-Australian' ones and 'more correct'. Recalling the relative ease with which central and southern Europeans used to communicate without a common language other than English (The old commonality of 'foreignness' which marked boundaries with the dominant group, cf. Giles 1977, Tajfel and Turner 1979) the 'Europeans' often hold the 'Asians' responsible for communication breakdown. One Maltese foreman maintained that there was no trouble with English communication among his workers, but nevertheless complained that some of his 'Asian' workers don't obey him; "I ask them to do something, they say yes, and two hours later when I come back it's not done".

The Austrian leading hand commented that she used to get on so well with Greeks, Italians, and Yugoslavs 'but the Asians never seem to understand what I say how ever hard I try'. Part of this is due to differences in rules for small talk in central and southern European work communication on the one hand, and Vietnamese or Chinese work communication on the other (see example in 4.2). In videotapes of employee participation meetings,

men from South Asia excel in holding the floor. But some of them are far less successful in small talk on the factory floor which is very important in establishing solidarity networks.

The dyadic work-place communication has so far revealed a number of sharp contrasts:

(i) Long turns versus short turns, e.g. in complaints and apologies. 'Holding the floor' may, in itself, be a face-saving device but long complaints and apologies enable the speaker to achieve what is culturally necessary to 'do with words'. Not only do *Bs* produce shorter turns, they expect others, including *As* to do so.

(ii) The hidden implications in *A's* speech acts are understood by *As* rather than *Bs*.

(iii) *As* tend to apologize to *As* and to avoid apologizing to *Bs*.

(iv) *Bs* do not expect small talk to occur in work domain interaction (their own and 'others'), whereas *As* tend not to mark such 'mixing' of domain routines.

(v) Some but not all *As* tend to excel in formal discourse (including keeping turns) but not in small talk.

As tend to be central and southern Europeans, people from the Indian sub-continent, Latin Americans and Filipinos (most of all Croatians, Indians and Sri Lankans of different ethnic backgrounds, least Maltese). *Bs* tend to be eastern and south-east Asians (excluding Filipinos) (most of all Vietnamese, least Indonesians). Finns also fit into this group. The more *B*-ish a group, the more likely it is that *As* will experience non-communication with them. Miscommunication will occur within any dyads representing the two groups and, to a lesser extent, within groups *A* and *B*.

These contrasts require negotiation of meaning, or experience and training if communication breakdown and conflict are to be avoided. Negotiation generally results in repetition or

paraphrase. Repetition appears to be the normal means in our South Asian informants.

CULTURAL VALUES

So far I have suggested that particular speech acts are realized and interpreted in different ways by people from different cultural backgrounds and that speech act utterances are embedded in discourse segments which are governed by different patterns of turn exchange.

I would argue that this inter-cultural variation is determined by differences in cultural value systems. The details are based on progress results which may well need to be modified by new data in this project. This concurs with Gumperz's (1982: 162) notion of 'contextualization' - 'The identification of specific conversational exchanges as representative of socio-culturally familiar activities' through cues.

Hill *et al.* (1986) have developed the dichotomy 'discernment' (the almost automatic observation of social conventions) and 'volition' (the individual's decision whether to participate in verbal etiquette or not). This is related to the well-known cultural dichotomy individualistic vs. collectivist (See e.g. Smolicz 1979: 58-59). In this way variation can be explained in verbal behaviour motivated by politeness in interactions between collectivist Chinese or Vietnamese and, say, Finns or Germans who are generally regarded as individualistically oriented. Collective values in Chinese and Vietnamese entail a balance between harmony and authority, something that is reflected in pragmatic rules and discourse structures. In this connection I would like to refer to Hofsteede's (1980) contrastive analysis of cultures in a business context based on the categories *power distance* (elitist vs. pluralist), *uncertainty avoidance* (conformity, anxiety level), *individualism* , and *masculinity* (i.e. aggressiveness). According to Hofsteede, south-east Asians show low uncertainty avoidance and a high power distance indicator, but Germans, Austrians and Swiss combine high uncertainty avoidance with low

power distance while 'Yugoslavs' have a high uncertainty avoidance indicator as well as a high level of power distance. Italians and Latin Americans show a high level of both uncertainty avoidance and power distance. British, Americans, Australians, Dutch and Scandinavians combine a tendency towards 'feminine' behaviour with individualism and low levels of elitism and conformity.

While such broad categorizations need to be treated with caution, they can have some explanatory function when it comes to relating discourse phenomena, especially those connected with work ethics, to cultural value systems. At a completely different level, a tendency towards abstract style in written (especially academic) discourse (Clyne 1987) can be seen in terms of Galtung's (1985) classification of English-based intellectual style as 'more tolerant, more democratic, less elitist' than its German-based counterpart.

Many of these questions relate to 'politeness' which has been developed into the basis for a pragmatic theory by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). The main tenets of this model are the degree of relative power, social distance, and the ranking of impositions in a particular culture. While Brown and Levinson's principal concern is to establish a framework of universals, drawing on examples from English, Tamil, and the American Indian language Tzeltal, they show how strategies are employed on the basis of the three main sociological variables. Brown and Levinson distinguish between *negative politeness* which avoids conflicts through modesty, formality and restraint (i.e. not imposing), and *positive politeness* where people draw closer by showing appreciation of one another. However, the basic concepts on which Brown and Levinson rely, especially the notion of 'face', are shown by Wierzbicka (1985, 1989) and others, such as Tannen (1986), Matsumoto (1988), to have a strong anglocentric bias.

'The notion of *directness* (vs. indirectness) often employed in studies of cross-cultural or contrastive pragmatics is also found wanting by Wierzbicka (e.g. 1989) because they are 'applied to totally different phenomena, which are shaped by totally different

values' (1989: 30). So American culture is claimed to have more direct rules in comparisons with Japanese (e.g. Lebra 1986) but more indirect ones in comparisons with either Jewish or Black American culture (e.g. Schiffrin 1984, Kochman 1981 respectively). In contrast to the claims of universalists, the differences postulated by Wierzbicka are of a qualitative rather than a quantitative nature - she depicts them as a matter of cultural priorities. She represents as follows in terms of semantic primitives the Russian, Japanese and mainstream American emphases in the interpretation of 'good interpersonal relations':

1. 'warmth' of the kind associated with Russian culture
   I feel something good towards you
2. 'considerateness' and empathy as in Japanese culture
   I don't want someone to feel bad
3. general 'friendliness' as in mainstream American culture
   I want everyone to feel something good

Japanese use the bare imperative to show deference while Russians employ it with a particle to show politeness in contrast to the English tendency to substitute a question to avoid imposition. The question of rhythm of discourse is introduced by Wierzbicka (1989) when she distances from 'wanting' and 'not wanting' the Black and Jewish American tendency for speakers to overlap and interrupt, 'to share ... excitement, interest, and mutual involvement'. 'It is a difference between saying it at once and saying it at what one sees at an appropriate moment'. While we are not employing semantic primitives in our analysis, we *are* finding that the discourse differences in our corpus are based on different cultural values and not on mere variation in emphasis.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Language and social policies in Australia over the past two decades have increasingly recognized linguistic and cultural diversity in a positive way while still stressing the overarching position of the English language (See Section 1). But as I pointed out at the start

of this paper, the policy on the teaching of English as a Second Language to adults (though not the ideals of many of the teachers) still rests on some outdated assumptions. Our study is showing that non-English-speaking migrants need to be able to understand how non-English speakers of other cultural groups use the English language. It would also suggest that native English speakers need some training in inter-cultural communication - beyond the occasional ad hoc sensitivation workshops that very few have the opportunity to attend. This might be possible through an extension of the scope of the Adult Migrant Education Program, including its English in the Work Place section.

Inter-cultural communication breakdown has social and economic consequences for both labour and management since it can lead to interpersonal conflict, a decrease in work safety, and a drop in productivity. It contributes greatly to the billions of dollars lost in industry due to communication problems which is referred to in the recent discussion paper on literacy and language (Dawkins 1990). It can have the effect of preventing people from realizing their potential to the fullest and undermining the thrust toward industrial democracy.

The award restructuring under the National Wage Case decision of 12 August 1988 provides for upgrading of skills and ensuring that working patterns and arrangements 'enhance flexibility and the efficiency of the industry'. The third of the 'associated steps' in considering the award restructuring is 'to provide the means by which upward mobility occurs through education, training and service' (ACTU 1989). In the ensuing discussion, including award negotiating documents on specific industries, survival English as a second language has played a significance role, e.g.

> The company will grant all employees who are unable to adequately communicate in the English language, time off without loss of pay during normal working hours to attend courses...' (Metals/ TeleCom Federation)
>
> '..that all employees seeking competency in the English

> language will receive time off without loss of pay during normal working hours to attend agreed recognized courses'. (Health)
>
> 'A set of principles for negotiations have been adopted which include... Training in basic skills - numeracy, literacy and English language'. (Rail) (ACTU 1989)

Basic English as a second language is one of the areas in which arrangements are being made for companies (with a payroll of over $200,000 p.a. to fulfil their obligation to spend 1% of their income on upgrading the skills of employees under the Training Guarantee Act 1990, with the obligation rising to 1.5% from July 1992).

It is essential, for the reasons mentioned above, that the life and work chances of employees without adequate English be improved in this way. However, the research in progress, on which I have reported in this paper, demonstrates the importance of improving communication beyond the 'bare survival' level in the interests of a more harmonious, just and economically viable Australian society.

NOTES

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shop stewards, and union representatives.

2.	#	filled pause	<xx>	unrecognizable speech
	+	unfilled pause	→ ←	acceleration, slowing down
	.	glottal stop	↑ ↓	rising, falling intonation

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